

**Testimony of Louis Reed, Parent, Bridgeport Public Schools
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Appropriations Committee
February 16, 2016**

Good evening members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Louis Reed. I'm the proud father of five children, and I live in New Haven, Connecticut.

I grew up in Bridgeport, and attended Bridgeport's district schools.

When I was in second grade, something happened that's stuck with me my whole life. My teacher took me out in the hallway, and spoke these words: "Louis, if you don't stop doing what you're doing, you're going to end up just like those kids I read about in the paper."

She was right. I got caught up in the street life that plagued Bridgeport at that time, and spent 13 years in prison. While I was incarcerated, I turned my life around. I got my college degree, and became certified as a substance abuse counselor and a minister.

Today, I work to help individuals coming out of prison, who are often homeless and have a high rate of recidivism, receive the education and job training they need to become members of Connecticut's workforce.

I tell this story because I know firsthand how important education is for young people who grew up like I did. If I had had access to great public schools, I don't believe I would have ended up where I did.

That's why I'm here today. All across Connecticut, the schools that serve low-income black and brown kids are chronically underfunded. Nowhere is this situation worse than in Bridgeport, and no students are treated more unfairly than charter school students.

Charter school students, on average, receive \$2,800 less from the state than traditional public school students. Every year, that adds up to millions of dollars of aid that the state is denying the children who need it most.

When state leaders underfund our kids, they're sending a clear message to these young people: you're worth less than other students. Your lives and your futures

are less valuable because of who you are, where you live, and the type of school you attend.

This discrimination is unacceptable. Parents, educators, and other advocates believe our children are capable of amazing things, and we're fighting for their rights.

Underfunding our charter schools isn't just about a number on a page -- it's about abandoning children who grew up like I did, depriving them of the chance to achieve their dreams.

We need to make this message clear to our elected officials in Hartford, and demand that they fund all public school children equally.

Until Connecticut closes the unfair funding gap between district and public charter school students, we'll continue to fight.

Thank you so much.